

IV. Public Access Policies

A. 1996 Public Access Policies

The 1996 Public Access Plan provided a comprehensive discussion of policy provisions for general access to a public drinking water supply. The analysis included an overview of Federal and State water supply regulations, a discussion of controls for recreational use, a survey of management controls of large water systems, and a discussion of existing uses of MDC watershed lands.

In addition, the Division of Watershed Management has its own regulations, 350 CMR11.00, promulgated by the Commissioners of the Metropolitan District Commission pursuant to the authority granted under St. 1992 ch.36. The purpose of St. 1992 ch.36 is to improve the protection of the metropolitan water supply. Some restrictions that are especially pertinent are summarized below:

- Entrance on and exit from land of the Watershed System [Quabbin Reservoir, Ware River, Wachusett Reservoir and Sudbury Reservoir watersheds] shall be made through gates or other designated areas.
- No Person is allowed within any land of the Watershed System, except from one hour before sunrise to one hour after sunset, unless authorized by a written permit from the Commission or its designee.
- Powered boats are prohibited within the Waters of the Watershed System except in areas designated by the Commission or its designee.
- All acts which pollute or may pollute the water supply are prohibited. No litter or refuse of any sort may be thrown or left in or on any land or water within any Watershed System. All Persons within said System shall use the sanitary facilities provided for public use.
- Cooking and all fires are prohibited within the Watershed System.
- No Person shall wade or swim in any Tributary or Surface Waters on or within the property of the Commonwealth except at areas designated by the Commission or its designee.
- Organized sports or activities are prohibited within the Watershed System except by written permit from the Commission or its designee.
- Possession or drinking of alcoholic beverages is prohibited on MDC properties.
- No person shall drive a motorized vehicle within the Watershed System except upon roads authorized for such use by the Commission or its designee.

350 CMR 11.09, General Rules and Regulations for the Protection of Watersheds and the Watershed System are included in Appendix B of this report. Chapter III details numerous recreation activities and evaluates them using specific criteria that protect water quality.

Four management zones were developed to help implement the 1996 Plan, providing different levels of access for specific activities (**see Figure 5**). The following is a brief description of these areas:

- ***The Intake Protection Zone*** provides primary protection of the water supply by prohibiting public access near reservoir intake structures. The Intake Protection Zone includes four miles of reservoir shoreline, at both the North and South Dikes, and the reservoir's South Shore, from Hastings Cove to the Cosgrove Intake.

- ***The Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines and West Waushacum Pond Zone*** includes watershed lands around the reservoir and nearby tributaries (Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers), and at the West Waushacum Pond.
- ***The Tributary Headwaters Zone*** is made up of MDC/DWM lands located outside of the Route I-190 and Route 62 corridor.
- ***The Off-Watershed Lands Zone*** is approximately 680 acres of MDC/DWM land that does not drain to the Wachusett Reservoir.

B. Status of Recommendations made in 1996 Plan

The Key Recommendations made in the 1996 Plan, summarized above, have been implemented. Other recommendations have been partially implemented, due either to resource limitations or re-assessment of the recommendation. Table 2 provides a synopsis of the recommendations made in the 1996 Plan and current implementation status.

Table 2: Summary and Status of 1996 Public Access Plan Recommendations

1. Improve Protection of Aqueduct Intakes		
Recommendation	Status	Comments
Reduce access to reservoir shoreline and intake structures by expanding the primary protection zone to include an additional two miles of reservoir shoreline at the North Dike.	Accomplished	Ongoing MDC/DWM Ranger presence is required to ensure compliance with the expanded no-access area.
Prohibit snowmobiles at the North Dike and at all other MDC lands in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed.	Accomplished	Ongoing MDC/DWM Ranger presence is required to keep snowmobiles off of certain MDC - owned areas.
Install additional gates and barriers to prevent access from all recreational vehicles.	Ongoing	Gates and barriers have been added in key locations. Additional measures need to be considered and are discussed in Chapters V and VI.
Allow limited access for hunting on MDC/DWM lands in Tributary Headwaters Zone.	Accomplished	A pilot hunting program was established in 1996. The hunting program was successful, and was made permanent in 1998.
Work with Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission (MAC) to restrict acrobatic and low-flying planes over the reservoir at Wachusett Dam to prevent potential contamination of source water at reservoir intakes in the event of an accident.	Ongoing	Discussions were held on this topic. State and Federal regulations are enforced through coordination with the Massachusetts State Police.

Figure 5: Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Public Access Management Zones

Go to www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/watershed/documents/2003WachAccfig5.pdf

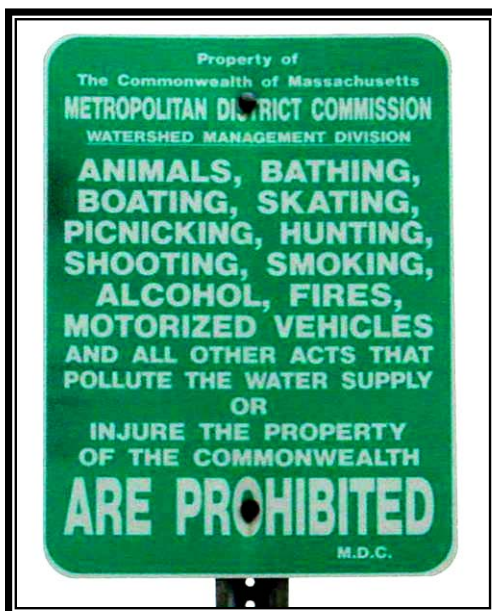
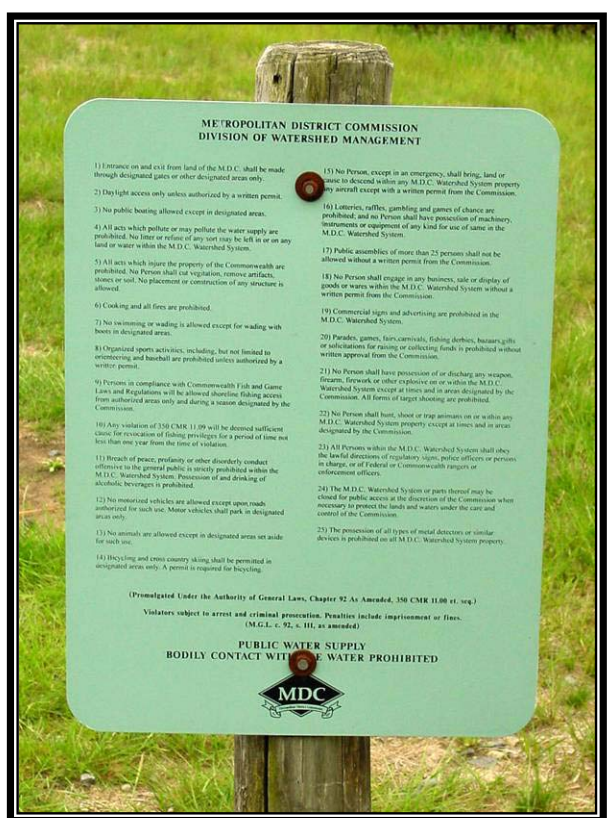
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Table 2 (continued)

Allow limited access for off-road bicycling on MDC/DWM lands in Tributary Headwaters Zone.	Accomplished	Bicycling areas have been established on MDC/DWM properties. In addition, MDC/DWM has worked with Wachusett Greenways on portions of the Mass Central Rail Trail in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed.
2. Provide Greater Enforcement		
Recommendation	Status	Comments
Improve MDC/DWM training of State Police to target violations of watershed regulations.	Ongoing	Since the plan was written, coordination and communication has expanded with the Holden barracks of the State Police. State police provide assistance to MDC/DWM rangers as needed. Informal training occurs regularly with State Police officers assigned to watershed patrols.
Create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with local police to assist with enforcement of MDC rules and regulation on water supply lands.	Re-assessed	It was determined that a formal MOU is not necessary; and regular coordination and communication as now exists is fully adequate to deal with interagency issues that may arise.
Advocate legislative changes to existing law (M.G.L. Ch. 92, s. 11) that will decriminalize certain activities that would allow State Police and Watershed Rangers to issue tickets for common trespass activities of a non-criminal nature, such as dog walking and swimming.	Re-assessed	The current need for these legislative changes has diminished since the inception of the ranger program and expanded coordination with the State Police. The issue will continue to be monitored.
3. Provide Sanitary Facilities		
Recommendation	Status	Comments
Install portable toilets at three sites located around the reservoir where intensive and prolonged use occurs to reduce potential introduction of pathogens to the reservoir.	Accomplished	Location of the toilets will be re-assessed as well as feasibility of more permanent facilities. More information on this topic is provided in Chapters V and VI.
Require local towns to provide portable toilets at all sports fields that are leased from the MDC/DWM	In Progress	To date, this recommendation has not been implemented. It will be carried forward as a recommendation in this Update and will be addressed in any new leases issued by the Division.
Monitor public use of MDC/DWM sanitary facilities through visual documentation and water quality sampling to determine the effectiveness of public toilets in the reduction of fecal pathogens from authorized recreational use.	Ongoing	It is evident from visual surveys that visitors use the portable toilets. It has not been possible, however, to document any water quality improvements since their installation.

Table 2 (continued)

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5. Improve Signs		
Recommendation	Status	Comments
Install new signs that incorporate international symbols to augment existing regulatory signs and clarify which activities are authorized and which are prohibited on MDC watershed lands.	Accomplished	See page 33 for examples.
Provide appropriate signs at all major entry points to MDC/DWM lands with a map of the reservoir to better orient and inform users of where access is authorized for passive recreational use.	Accomplished	Signs were made and posted. Maps have been made but not yet widely distributed. The need to update and revise maps is discussed in Chapters V and VI.
Develop interpretive signs for installation at key locations within the watershed to increase use awareness of watershed protection priorities.	Ongoing	Kiosks have been constructed and installed in four key locations for use in public education. Numerous bulletin boards have also been installed at minor access points to disseminate information. The additional use of interpretive signs at other points in the watershed is discussed in Chapters V and VI.
6. Educational Programs		
Recommendation	Status	Comments
Establish a fully operational field education and surveillance program to increase public awareness of the importance of the watershed's role in providing high quality drinking water to local and regional water supply systems.	Accomplished	Wachusett Ranger Patrols have been established. The Rangers provide ongoing contact with the public providing education and surveillance.



Examples of MDC/DWM signs in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed

Table 2 (continued)

Work with watershed communities to increase educational programs for areas that are heavily used for recreation, such as the North Dike and the Old Stone Church, including the establishment of a Greenway Trust organization.	Accomplished	A highly successful working relationship has been developed with the Wachusett Greenways, a team of volunteers working to expand trails and open spaces linking Wachusett area communities. MDC/DWM has assisted with work on the Mass Central Rail Trail, establishing a three mile link on MDC/DWM land in West Boylston and Holden.
Create an MDC/DWM resource center so that education materials can be made available to local town officials, teachers, and organizations.	Ongoing	MDC Division staff has begun work on a Resource Center, which will be located in John Augustus Hall.
Commit to utilizing Stillwater Farm as an educational resource for watershed protection.	Accomplished	House renovation will be completed in 2003, at which time it can be used as an interpretive facility.

7. Community Participation

Recommendation	Status	Comments
Continue to work closely with the Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Citizens Advisory Committee (WAC) to implement workable solutions for immediate and long-term protection of MDC water supply resources.	Ongoing	The WAC was meeting on a regular basis during and after the production of the 1996 Plan. Public interest in this group, however, subsequently waned. This inattention could have negative connotations, but the lack of interest may also reflect general satisfaction with current policies. The production of this Plan Update provides an opportunity to reconvene the WAC.
Collaborate with watershed communities and other environmental or recreational groups to develop educational programs for local schools.	Ongoing	MDC/DWM Wachusett staff participated in WREEN (Wachusett Regional Environmental Educators Network) until its demise in 2002. MDC/DWM Rangers coordinate educational efforts, and Wachusett staff participate in educational activities. Division staff administer the state-wide ProjectWET (Water Education for Teachers) program as well as provide leadership for the student science competition Envirothon.
Organize watershed "clean up" events on a regular basis with local communities and other environmental or recreational interest groups to instill public stewardship of watershed resources.	Ongoing	Several clean-up days have been conducted, often as part of Earth Day celebrations. The Division's Technical Assistance program provided funding for regional Household Hazardous Materials collections. MDC/DWM will continue to sponsor clean-ups in the watershed, and will look for opportunities to expand these efforts.
Work with local and regional greenway committees to evaluate appropriate trail connections to land within the watershed that are remote to Wachusett Reservoir.	Ongoing	Wachusett Superintendent, Rangers and other staff work with Wachusett Greenways and other groups on regional trail issues.

Table 2 (continued)

8. Improve Site Maintenance		
Recommendation	Status	Comments
Use best management practices (BMPs) to stabilize and restore MDC/DWM trails and shoreline areas where intensive use occurs.	Ongoing	Work occurs on an as-needed basis to restore degraded areas.
Employ sustainable land management practices to enhance filtration capacity of watershed buffers and to reduce the need for landscape maintenance activities.	Ongoing	Maintenance activities have been updated to leave Reservoir buffers in a more natural state.

C. Overview of Current Public Access Issues

Implementation of the recommendations in the 1996 Plan, as detailed in Section B above, has resulted in better protection from impacts of public access. Identifying distinct Management Zones has provided a successful structure for managing public access; in particular, establishing the Intake Protection Zone restricted immediate access to the most critical areas of the water system. Other measures promoted by the 1996 Plan that were successfully implemented include:

- Developing the Watershed Rangers into an effective and consistent official presence to visitors. The Watershed Rangers ensure that MDC regulations are followed, and they have also evolved into an important element for handling emerging security concerns.
- Significantly improving communication and cooperation with state and local police, resulting in better prevention and protection.
- Installing portable toilets at three locations.
- Placing improved signs at key points on MDC properties throughout the watershed.
- Increasing education and outreach efforts.

There are, however, ongoing issues and areas of general concern where improvements can be made. These include:

- **Structural and Access Controls:** Gates and other barriers need to be continually assessed. Parking problems continue along roads, especially at popular gates and sites.
- **Signs:** There are some areas where signs, despite MDC/DWM improvements, are still confusing or other indirect communication problems persist.
- **Maps:** Improved maps would better guide public access to the designated areas of the watershed.
- **Enforcement:** The effectiveness of the ranger program has been hindered at times due to budget and staff limitations. Dog walking, horseback riding, ATV use and snowmobiling continue to occur on MDC/DWM lands, despite extensive education and surveillance efforts of MDC/DWM Rangers.
- **Education:** While significant achievements were accomplished, budget and staff have not been adequate to provide the programs envisioned in the 1996 Plan.
- **Sanitation:** The location of portable toilets needs to be re-evaluated, different/additional sites considered, and the feasibility of constructing more permanent facilities evaluated. Trash dumping remains problematic.

- ♦ **Encroachments:** The increase in MDC/DWM property has made monitoring for encroachments by abutters an on-going need (this concern is also addressed in the Wachusett Reservoir Watershed Land Management Plan: 2001-2010).

D. Current Issues by Management Zone

This section provides a status report and policy assessment for each of the management zones prescribed in the 1996 Plan. The following discussion also makes frequent reference to numbered gates. The MDC/DWM has established numbered gates to access roads on MDC/DWM lands surrounding the reservoir. These numbered gates provide a useful reference for describing access entry points to MDC/DWM-owned land for both monitoring and public safety purposes (see **Figure 6**). The gates are numbered sequentially, in a clockwise order, around the reservoir. Gate 1 is located near the entrance to the Cosgrove Intake; Gates 2 - 16 are located off Route 70, Gates 17 - 26 are located off Route 140, and Gates 27 - 42 are located off Route 110.

1. Intake Protection Zone

1996 Public Access Policy: No Public Access.

Current Status: The boundary of the Intake Protection Zone is fenced and posted with MDC/DWM signs (see **Figure 7**). No Access signs are posted at the MDC/DWM Gates along Route 70, which are north of the Fishing Limit (Gates 1 - 5). As recommended in the 1996 Plan, a four foot fence was installed along the North Dike, to prevent shoreline access. The remaining portion of the North Dike is open to the public, and managed as Off - Watershed Land (see **section 4, below**). The North Dike is a very popular area and receives heavy use. The most frequently used access points are Gate 39 and Gate 40.

MDC/DWM lands in the vicinity of the North Dike and South Dike were divided into two management zones in the 1996 Plan. The zones were based, in part, on the hydrology of the watershed. Thus, access restrictions for some of the popular areas at the northern end of the reservoir (such as areas below the North Dike and the Wachusett Dam, and the Wachusett Dam Promontory) are discussed in **Section 4 Off-Watershed Lands**.

1996 Policy Assessment: Changes implemented since the 1996 Plan have provided greater protection around the Cosgrove water supply intake. The No-Access Policy works well, greatly reducing the concerns of improper public access in this zone. Nevertheless, trespassing is an ongoing problem, with the most frequent violations on the Route 70 side of the reservoir, and often around Gate 5, which is the boundary of the “no-access” zone. The Watershed Rangers regularly patrol these areas, reminding visitors that there is no public access in this area. State Police enforcement is used when necessary to maintain the integrity of this zone.

Since the events of September 11, 2001 there has been a need for additional security throughout the watershed, particularly in the area around the intake. MDC has responded by providing additional Watershed Ranger patrols and increased awareness and surveillance by all

Figure 6: Wachusett Reservoir Gates

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Figure 7: Intake Protection Zone

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MDC/DWM Wachusett staff. Additional patrols by State Police and the presence of National Guard troops at the Cosgrove Intake building have further increased security of the water supply intake. Temporary barriers have been added to these areas.

2. Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines and West Waushacum Pond Protection Zone

1996 Public Access Policy: Allowed uses include walking, hiking, seasonal shoreline fishing, and cross-country skiing. Year-round shore-line fishing is authorized at the Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers, upstream of Thomas Basin; fishing with waders allowed upstream of the MDC Dam at the Oakdale Power Station on the Quinapoxet River and upstream of the Stillwater River confluence with Waushacum Brook. Non-motorized boating and fishing are authorized at the West Waushacum Pond. Canoeing is allowed on the Stillwater River upstream of the take-out at the steel bridge at Muddy Pond Rd and on the Quinapoxet River upstream of the turn-off on River Rd. between Canada Mills and the Oakdale Power Station. No body contact with water (i.e., swimming, wading) is allowed in the zone except for fishing with waders in the above mentioned areas. Access is authorized from dawn to dusk only.

Current Status: The Reservoir and Tributary Management Zone includes all MDC land around the reservoir that lies beyond the four-mile Intake Protection Zone, and other MDC land adjacent to the Thomas Basin and West Waushacum Pond (see **Figure 8**). While more activity is allowed in this zone than at the Intake Protection Zone, Division rules and regulations limit access and restrict the type of activities allowed to minimize public access impacts.

There are many popular sites in this management zone, such as Gate 35, Bob's Hot Dog Truck, the Old Stone Church, Mass. Fish and Wildlife West Boylston Headquarters, the Central Mass. Rail Trail, South Bay, Thomas Basin, and Stillwater Farm. Many of these sites experience parking problems, such as over-crowding onto the roadway and erosion. This is also a very popular area for biking, *although off-road biking is not allowed in this management zone*.

1996 Policy Assessment: Steel closure gates and fencing restrict access to much of the MDC/DWM lands in this management zone. Most access to lands further out from the reservoir in this zone is also through gates. Maintaining these gates is a top priority for the Division because they provide an effective barrier to illegal dumping.

The MDC/DWM has placed signs at these points of entry so that all visitors are educated regarding specific rules and regulations pertaining to each access point. Despite the fact that the restrictions are well posted, many visitors continue to ignore the rule that dogs are not allowed on MDC/DWM lands in this zone. Regular surveillance by Ranger staff is also required in warm weather to prevent swimming.

Visitors and people just passing through the area throw away large amounts of trash. Illegal dumping of construction debris and electronic equipment on MDC/DWM lands has increased significantly since the 1996 Plan was written. MDC/DWM does not have the resources to pick this trash up on a regular basis. The Division has been forced to close the more remote turnoffs from the public ways to combat this activity.

3. Tributary Headwaters Zone

1996 Public Access Policy: All activities allowed in the Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines

Zone are allowed in this zone – walking, hiking, cross-country skiing. Year-round fishing is also allowed, and fishing with waders is authorized on the Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers upstream of Thomas Basin. Due to its distance from the Wachusett Reservoir, additional special use activities – off road bicycling, canoeing, and hunting – are allowed at designated areas in this zone.

Current Status: The Tributary Headwaters Zone is comprised of watershed lands that are distant from the reservoir and its nearby tributaries (see **Figure 9**).

1996 Policy Assessment: Two year pilot projects, as recommended by the 1996 Plan, were implemented for both hunting and bicycling in order to evaluate the impact of these activities on MDC/DWM lands and to determine if there were any adverse effects to water quality.

Hunting: Hunting has traditionally occurred on much of the private lands located in the Tributary Headwaters Zone. MDC/DWM has purchased several large tracts of land in this management zone over the last fifteen years. Many hunters felt that hunting should be allowed to continue on this land now in MDC ownership. A pilot hunting program was approved in 1996 for a two-year period, limited to MDC-owned lands in the Tributary Headwaters Zone.

This arrangement is consistent with policy established at Quabbin Reservoir, where hunting is allowed during all state hunting seasons on that watershed's "Off-Reservation" lands (the annual Deer Hunt provides the only hunting access to all other MDC/DWM lands in the Quabbin Reservoir watershed). In addition to requiring a valid Massachusetts hunting license, the pilot program established the requirement of an MDC Special Use permit to hunt on MDC/DWM lands.

The MDC/DWM found no significant impact to watershed resources during the two year trial period. The hunting program was made permanent in 1998. The MDC/DWM will continue to allow hunting in designated areas within the Tributary Headwaters Zone. A Special Permit, issued by the MDC/DWM will still be required to hunt on MDC/DWM lands. The hunting boundary will be changed to include all MDC/DWM owned lands west of Route I-190.

All other applicable state, local, and federal hunting rules and regulations apply. The Division will rely on state hunting regulations to define areas open to hunting in the Tributary Headwaters Zone. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife regulations state that, "Discharge of any Firearm or release of any arrow upon or across any state or hard-surfaced highway, or within 150 feet of any such highway, or possession of a loaded firearm, discharge of a firearm or hunting on the land of another within 500 feet of any dwelling or building in use, except as authorized by the owner or occupant thereof." MDC/DWM believes that these rules will dictate to the hunter the locations that are appropriate for hunting. MDC/DWM will prepare an easy to read map to distribute to hunters with their Special Permits.

As part of updating the Access Plan, the MDC/DWM conducted a survey, written and mailed during the fall of 2002, to permitted hunters (see Appendix A). In summary, it was found that DWM lands are used by a large number of hunters on a regular basis. The data suggests that within the hunting community at-large, local hunters utilize DWM lands the most. Based on written comments, DWM land is highly valued. Hunters pursue a range of species on DWM lands, although certain species – deer, turkey, upland birds –

Figure 8: Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines and West Waushacum Pond Protection Zone

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Figure 9: Tributary Headwaters Zone

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are the most popular. The survey showed that the average hunter spends relatively little time on DWM property during the course of a year. Further, few hunters hunt with a dog on DWM property.

The survey results are encouraging pertaining to hunter's encounter rate with various restricted activities. Hunters rarely or never encounter horses, ATVs or dirt bikes. Unfortunately, the encounter rate for trash is high. Although the survey results indicated that hunters felt the hunting map was at least somewhat helpful, written comments are contradictory. While the map may provide a very general overview of where hunting is allowed, it probably does not provide the level of detail needed by hunters to easily identify DWM parcels and access points. Locating DWM property in the field proved more difficult. While a large number of hunters indicated it was easy, a larger number of hunters found it somewhat difficult.

Canoeing: Canoeing has traditionally been allowed upstream of the Thomas Basin on the Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers. Canoes must be taken out of the Quinapoxet River at the turn-off on River Road that is between Canada Mills and the MDC dam and the MWRA Oakdale power station.. Canoes on the Stillwater River must be taken out at the steel bridge on Muddy Pond Road in Sterling. The lower limits of canoeing are both within the Reservoir and Tributary Shoreline Zone. Special-use permits are not required for this activity because there is a relatively small number of users and the canoeing season is quite short. This activity also includes the use of kayaks, which have become a very popular alternative to canoes. The Division has monitored this activity since 1996, and has found no significant adverse impacts to water quality or MDC/DWM lands.

Bicycling: Bicycling, which includes biking along public roads and off-road bicycling, is a very popular activity on MDC/DWM properties. The 1996 Plan designated lands in the Tributary Headwaters zone for a two year pilot off-road bicycling program. Staff worked with bicycling enthusiasts to mark trails in two distinct areas. A map with biking trails was produced and a permit program developed. A two year pilot program was instituted in 1998 to identify users, disseminate information regarding biking on MDC/DWM owned lands, and monitor any impacts to watershed resources. The off-road bicycling pilot program ended in 2000, with no evidence of over-use leading to resource degradation.

In 1996, MDC/DWM was asked to investigate the recreational use of the abandoned railroad corridor along the Quinapoxet River. That investigation has lead to a Memorandum Of Agreement (MOA) with Wachusett Greenways Inc., a non-profit community-based organization that supports a regional network of non-motorized trails and open space corridors. A 3.2 mile long section of the Mass Central Rail Trail was constructed from Thomas Street in West Boylston to River Street in Holden. MDC/DWM then made forest road improvements from River Street, allowing biking to proceed for an additional 1 mile to Manning Street. Wachusett Greenways subsequently created 1.2 miles of trail on MDC/DWM lands from Manning Street to Route 31. Development of these trails has allowed MDC/DWM to direct activities to areas that are well controlled and limits impacts to the watershed's natural resources. Illegal bike activity on the forest roads adjacent to the main basin of the Reservoir has been significantly reduced since 1996, partly due to the availability of these other areas for biking.

Poutwater Pond: The Poutwater Pond area was designated as a Nature Preserve in 1998, the first such designation under the state's Nature Preserve Act. The Nature Preserves program was created by a 1990 amendment to MGL Ch. 131, Section 10; under the act, state lands within the jurisdiction of the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) may be nominated to become a Nature Preserve. Nature Preserves are intended to serve in perpetuity as examples of the state's native natural heritage. They are dedicated for the conservation of natural communities and

native species of plants and animals, and for scientific research and education. Nature Preserves are recognized by statute as areas to be monitored and maintained in a natural condition; they should be used and managed in a manner consistent with protecting and perpetuating that condition.

MDC, the Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife), and the Town of Holden collectively protect an extensive area surrounding the bog and wetland system (including the drainage area for the bog and pond). The Preserve includes: 213 acres under the care and control of MDC, encompassing the pond, the majority of its watershed, and adjacent downstream wetland areas; 11 acres under the control of MassWildlife that contain an upland area that drains to the pond; the Town of Holden owns an additional 11 acres immediately adjacent to the Preserve boundary. The 1997 Poutwater Pond Nature Preserve Protection Plan contains a detailed inventory of the preserve's flora and fauna as well as the cultural history and resources of the area, a description of the public uses of this area, and recommendations for controlling access, serving public education needs, and protecting the natural resources of the preserve.

The main impacts to the site are from group visits to the bog (annual tours from local colleges and conservation organizations) and from a poorly conducted, private logging operation in the upland forest just outside of the Nature Preserve boundary. Group visits left a well-worn trail through a section of the floating mat. The trail has been restored and upgraded by the MDC with a boardwalk that minimizes impacts to the bog vegetation. The recent logging operation caused road erosion and left excessive logging debris in adjacent upland areas. There has been ongoing Off-Road Vehicle and Snowmobile use in the area, which is not allowed on MDC property. The Watershed Rangers continue to monitor the area for these illegal activities and work with the State Police to enforce MDC regulations.

The Nature Preserve regulations (321 CMR 11.06 and 11.07) provide the general framework for administering nature preserves. However, the law defers to the administering agency for some rules if they differ. Access hours are different for both MDC and MassWildlife lands in the Preserve: MDC allows entry from 1 hour before to 1 hour after sunset; access is allowed 24 hours/day on MassWildlife property. The Nature Preserve rule requiring a special permit for groups of 10 or more persons is more stringent than MDC policy for the Wachusett Reservoir watershed; MDC has agreed to enforce the more stringent regulation in the Preserve. Hunting and trapping is allowed by regulation in Nature Preserves unless prohibited by the managing agencies.



Poutwater Pond

Poutwater Pond is significant for the unique geologic, hydrologic, and botanical characteristics of the site. It is an excellent educational resource for local schools, ranging from elementary to the college level.

4. Off-Watershed Lands

1996 Public Access Policy: Walking, bicycling (at Old Campground Rd. in Sterling and at the North Dike from Gates 39 - 40), fishing, cross-country skiing, and walking dogs with a leash below the dam are the limited uses allowed on these MDC lands that do not drain into Wachusett Reservoir watershed.

Current Status: The Off-Watershed Lands Zone is comprised of land owned by MDC that does not drain into Wachusett Reservoir. These are parcels located in Boylston (primarily to the east of Route 70), Sterling (chiefly in the vicinity of Old Campground Road), and MDC lands in Clinton (primarily below the North Dike and the Wachusett Dam). The 1996 Plan authorized bicycling at Old Campground Road, restricted to the existing roadway. The Off-Watershed Lands in Clinton require close surveillance by MDC/DWM Rangers and other staff, due to their proximity to the reservoir, dam and intake facilities.

1996 Policy Assessment: A fence, as called for in the 1996 Plan, was installed at the North Dike to prevent access to the shoreline. The land on the reservoir side of the fence is included in the Intake Protection Zone. All of the land north of the fence is included in the Off-Watershed Lands management zone. This area is accessed from Gates 36 - 41; it is very popular for walking and hiking.

Bicycling is allowed along an old rail bed from Gates 39 - 40. Common use, however, is for people – frequently families with children – to continue all the way to the bottom of the spillway. While current policy does not allow biking beyond Gate 40, and it is enforced by the Watershed Rangers, there have been no adverse impacts identified from biking on the rail bed beyond Gate 40.

The Off-Watershed Management Zone also includes the Promenade at the top of the dam, and the fountain and river areas at the base of the dam. Visitors and local residents traditionally have enjoyed visiting these scenic vistas. MDC Wachusett Administrative and Engineering Sections were historically stationed in the building at the base of the dam. Vehicular access to areas at the base of the dam was restricted in October of 1999 when MDC/DWM personnel were moved to the Administrative trailers on Wilson Street. This move was made to accommodate a three-year MWRA construction project on dam appurtenances and the need to modernize the administrative building.

Following September 11, concerns about potential terrorist attacks on the Wachusett Dam resulted in more stringent security measures. All public access is currently restricted in these areas. Only MDC, MWRA and other authorized personnel are allowed access at the Cosgrove intake. Access to the area below the Dam remains closed to the general public.

The 1996 Plan discussed the possibility of establishing a Visitors Center within the Off-Watershed Zone at the northern end of the Reservoir. Many people visit this portion of the reservoir, and a Visitor's Center would provide opportunities to educate the public about the reservoir, the Division's rules and regulation, watershed protection, and general environmental protection issues. Two sites considered for a Visitor's Center were the former MDC Police Station and the Wachusett Dam. The current budget situation does not support efforts to establish a Visitors' Center in this management zone.

There has been some public confusion generated by the demarcation of "Off-Watershed" lands within the general vicinity of the Intake Protection Zone. Although these lands do not drain to the

reservoir, they are some of the most visible and visited MDC/DWM properties.

E. New Policies

The MDC/DWM public access policies and programs effectively balance the protection of the Wachusett Reservoir with the desire of residents to enjoy MDC resources. This Plan Update generally maintains the pre-existing restrictions and policies for recreation.

There are two modifications to the management zone designations. One alteration is the establishment of I-190 as the boundary between the Tributary Headwaters Zone and the Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines and West Waushacum Pond Zone. The southern section of this border as defined in the 1996 Plan caused some confusion because it did not follow an easily identified boundary. Utilizing this significant landmark will simplify implementation of the MDC/DWM Public Access policies. The other change is the integration of all lands designated in the 1996 Plan as “Off-Watershed Lands” into the Intake Protection Zone. The elimination of the “Off-Watershed Land” zone does not alter the public access rules for this area (**see Figure 6**). MDC/DWM will continue to work to educate users in order to improve compliance with our regulations.

This section presents the 2003 Public Access Policies and a discussion of implementation issues in each protection zone. Table 3 compares the policies proposed in this update to the 1996 policies. Table 4 describes the new management area designations within the Intake Protection Zone. Table 5 is a summary of the updated MDC/DWM Public Access Policies for the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. Implementation activities are discussed in Section VI.

1. Intake Protection Zone

2003 Public Access Policy: Integrate “Off-Watershed Land” Zone. No Public Access in area solely considered “Intake Protection Zone” in 1996 Plan (New Area A1). All former “Off-Watershed Land” areas maintain public access policies established in 1996 Plan, except the removal of “No Trespassing” requirements from land northeast of Route 70, opposite Gates 1 and 2 (**see Table 4 and Figure 7**).

Table 3
Changes Between MDC/DWM Public Access Policy
in the Wachusett Reservoir Watershed
1996 vs. 2003

ACTIVITY	1996 POLICY	2003 Policy
Shoreline Fishing	Allowed seasonally in the Reservoir & Tributary Shoreline Zone; year round fishing allowed in Tributary Headwaters (with waders) and Off-Watershed Zones.	Integrate Off-Watershed Zone into Intake Protection Zone; no fishing allowed in Intake Protection Zone.
Hiking	Allowed in all areas except the Intake Protection Zone.	Expand to allow access to lands east of Gates 1 and 2 (Management Area A2).
Cross-Country Skiing	Allowed in all areas except the Intake Protection Zone.	Expand to Allow access to lands east of Gates 1 and 2 (Management Area A2).
Boating	Non-motorized boats allowed on Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers in the Tributary Headwaters Zone; non-motorized boats allowed on West Waushacum Pond.	No Change
Swimming	PROHIBITED	No Change
Bicycling	Pilot program allowed off-road bicycles, with MDC permit, in two areas within the Tributary Headwaters Zone.	No permit requirement for off-road biking in designated area; clarify policy to allow biking from Gate 39 to 42 (formerly Off-Watershed Zone).
Horseback Riding	PROHIBITED	No Change
Camping	PROHIBITED	No Change
Motorized Vehicles (ATVs, ORVs, Snowmobiles)	PROHIBITED	No Change
Hunting	Pilot program allowed hunting, with MDC permit, in specified areas within the Tributary Headwaters Zone.	Hunting allowed with MDC permit. Hunting area is entire Tributary Headwaters Zone (locations must still meet DWFELE regulations).
Dog Walking	Allowed below Wachusett Dam with leash or while hunting in Tributary Headwaters Zone.	No Change*

* All access below the Wachusett Dam is temporarily restricted until completion of construction activities.

Table 4
Intake Protection Zone Management Areas

INTAKE PROTECTION ZONE	AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES
AREA A Clinton & Boylston	
1. Dam and Gates 1-5 – area on the west side of R. 70 & east side of Rt. 70 that is north of Mile Hill Rd. and south of Rt. 62.	No Public Access
2. Area on the east side of Rt. 70 that is south of Mile Hill Rd. or north of Rt. 62.	Walking/Hiking Cross-Country Skiing
AREA B Clinton	
1. Promenade – area abutting westerly side of Route 70 & easterly of the dam	Walking/Hiking ⁺
2. Nashua River at River Road and Spillway – area located below the dam.	Walking/Hiking ⁺ Dogs with Leash ⁺ Cross-Country Skiing ⁺
AREA C Sterling & Clinton	
1. Gates 36 to Spillway – area north of the Intake Protection Zone line located on both the east and west sides of Route 110, from Gates 36 - Spillway.	Walking/Hiking* Cross-Country Skiing* Bicycling (from Gate 39 to 42 (base of Spillway) only)

⁺ While the activity is allowed by MDC policy, no public access is currently allowed in this area due to security reasons. These areas will be re-opened for this activity when conditions permit.

* There is no shoreline access; activities are allowed uphill of fence.

Implementation Issues: Since the events of September 11, 2001 there is an overall need for additional security, specifically in the area around the Cosgrove Intake. MDC/DWM will determine if there are areas where more aesthetically pleasing permanent barriers should be installed.

In the areas surrounding the Wachusett Dam, additional structural controls are needed to improve security and to discourage access when necessary. These would include better signs at the entrance to the Dam and improved barriers and better fencing at the Promenade. MDC/DWM will evaluate better access controls at the guardrails along Route 70, downhill of the promenade.

The land designated as “Off-Watershed Land” in the 1996 Plan will now be considered part of the Intake Protection Zone. The Intake Protection Zone (**see Figure 7**) now consists of three distinct geographic areas: Area A is the dam itself and the land directly surrounding it to the south; Area B is the promenade to the east and the area directly below the dam; Area C is comprised of the lands to the west of the dam. All public access restrictions and allowed uses remain the same as the 1996 Plan except for two changes:

- 💧 Foot access is now allowed east of Gates 1 and 2 (Area A2)
- 💧 Bicycling will be allowed from Gates 39 - 42 (the base of the spillway).

These areas do not drain into the reservoir, and no impacts have been observed from these activities.

MDC will maintain the possibility of a Visitor's Center in the Intake Protection Zone. Resources for this effort, however, are not currently available. Nevertheless, MDC/DWM will attempt not to take any actions that would preclude its development in an appropriate location, should funds become available in the future.

2. Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines and West Waushacum Pond

2003 Public Access Policy: No Change. Allowed uses include walking, hiking, seasonal shoreline fishing, and cross-country skiing. Year-round shore-line fishing is authorized at the Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers, upstream of Thomas Basin; fishing with waders allowed upstream of the MDC Dam at the Oakdale Power Station on the Quinapoxet River and upstream of the Stillwater River confluence with Waushacum Brook. Non-motorized boating and fishing are authorized at the West Waushacum Pond. Canoeing is allowed on the Stillwater River upstream of the take-out at the steel bridge at Muddy Pond Rd and on the Quinapoxet River upstream of the turn-off on River Rd. between Canada Mills and the Oakdale Power Station. No body contact with water (i.e., swimming, wading) is allowed in the zone except for fishing with waders in the above mentioned areas. Access is authorized from dawn to dusk only.

Implementation Issues:

Gates: Division staff will evaluate gates as they are currently set up, and identify areas where existing gates should be replaced with more secure pipe gates. Division staff will also develop a identification system for gates that currently are not numbered.



Examples of MDC/DWM Gates in the Wachusett Reservoir Watershed

Enforcement: Watershed Rangers will continue to enforce regulations against walking dogs and swimming. MDC/DWM will maintain cooperative efforts with local and state police on all enforcement issues, particularly illegal trash disposal.

The following are issues for particular sites within this zone:

Old Stone Church: This is one of the most popular sites within the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. It is a high priority for Ranger patrols, in order to continue educating visitors about our rules and regulations. Problems include disposal of trash, wading in the reservoir, and shoreline erosion.

Bob's Hot Dogs: Most people are surprised to learn that this very popular area is not under the control of the MDC/DWM. The parcel of land at the junction of Routes 140 and 12 is owned

by Massachusetts Highway Department. The area becomes very congested at peak times, and there are concerns regarding pedestrian and vehicular safety due to all the activity at this site. There is no clear “right-of-way” at the intersection of Rt. 140/Beaman Street and Lancaster Street.

Parking: Parking at popular sites continues to present a problem in this management zone. Specific sites include Gate 25, Gate 28, Gate 35, the Rail Trail, and a number of sites along Route 140 (popular fishing access areas, Bob’s Hot Dog, Stone Church).

Illegal Dumping: Dumping has occurred in the past in the River Road area of West Boylston and along Mill St in Holden. The potential for more dumping is a problem due to the remoteness of these areas and their relatively easy accessibility.

Sani-cans: The 1996 Plan recommended locating Sani-cans in three sites – Gate 19, Gate 28, and the Old Stone Church – all located in this management zone. The presence of these portable toilets has been beneficial. The facilities are used by visitors who would otherwise use improper sanitation methods if the portable toilets were not available. MDC/DWM Rangers have noted that the toilet at Gate 28, off Route 110 gets limited use.

Stillwater Farm: This site is being developed for educational use through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Friends of Wachusett. Once renovations are completed in 2003, the farm house will be used as an interpretive center.



*The house at Stillwater Farm
(19th Century right; 21st Century
above)*



Rail Trail: In the 1996 Plan, bicycling was prohibited on MDC/DWM lands within the Reservoir and Tributary Shoreline Zone. Since then, the MDC/DWM has worked with Wachusett Greenways to provide access on the Rail Trail. This is a very popular biking and hiking area. The trail is also used for cross country skiing and snowshoeing in the winter. MDC/DWM has a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Wachusett Greenways for the development and maintenance of trails through MDC/DWM property in the watershed. The Superintendent is a member of the Wachusett Greenways Mass Central Rail Trail Task Force, which meets regularly to discuss trail development and issues.

Waushacum Pond Zone: There are no major issues in this area. Some trash disposal problems with users are occasionally an issue. Erosion issues exist along the shoreline near the old railroad bed that separates West Waushacum Pond and the Quag, due to foot traffic on the steep slopes. Rail Trail plans being developed with Wachusett Greenways will include work to install a new bridge. This work will also include improvements to the eroded slopes.

3. Tributary Headwaters Zone

2003 Public Access Policy: Change boundary to follow Interstate 190; allow hunting in all areas that meet DFWELE regulations; no permit required for two off-road biking areas.

The following policy remains the same as 1996: All activities allowed in the Reservoir and Tributary Shorelines Zone are allowed in this zone – walking, hiking, cross-country skiing. Year-round fishing is also allowed, and fishing with waders is authorized on the Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers upstream of Thomas Basin. Canoeing is allowed at designated areas in this zone.

Implementation Issues:

Hunting: The MDC/DWM will continue to allow hunting in designated areas within the Tributary Headwaters Zone. A Special Permit, issued by the MDC/DWM will still be required to hunt on MDC/DWM lands. The hunting boundary will be changed to include all MDC/DWM owned lands west of Route I-190.

All other applicable state, local, and federal hunting rules and regulations apply. The Division will rely on state hunting regulations to define areas open to hunting in the Tributary Headwaters Zone. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife regulations state that, “Discharge of any Firearm or release of any arrow upon or across any state or hard-surfaced highway, or within 150 feet of any such highway, or possession of a loaded firearm, discharge of a firearm or hunting on the land of another within 500 feet of any dwelling or building in use, except as authorized by the owner or occupant thereof.” These rules will dictate to the hunter the locations that are appropriate for hunting on MDC/DWM property (the 2003 hunting rules are available on-line from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife at www.state.ma.us/dfwele/dfw/dfwpdf/Dfwab03.pdf). MDC/DWM will prepare an easy to read map to distribute to hunters with their Special Permits.

Canoeing: The MDC will continue to monitor for any impacts from canoeing or kayaking activities. Signs are necessary to clearly mark the take-out area at the River Rd. turn-off on the Quinapoxet River between Canada Mills and the Oakdale Power Station.

Bicycling: The two locations used in the Pilot Program will now be designated as bicycling areas. Due to the minimal impact to the land during the pilot phase and the limited number of bicyclists, no permits will be required for use of the area. Easy to read maps identifying the trails and noting the rules and regulations will be made available at MDC/DWM facilities, information kiosks, and on the agency’s website.

MDC/DWM will pursue working with bicycling groups to evaluate and monitor the trails on a regular basis. Due to limited resources, MDC/DWM will work to have volunteers maintain trails. MDC/DWM will monitor these areas for any impacts, and will re-evaluate limiting trail availability if increased use leads to watershed degradation or the need for significant resources

to provide maintenance.

Poutwater Pond: The MDC/DWM public access policies continue to support the objectives of the Poutwater Pond Nature Preserve:

- 💧 To protect the unique natural features included in this area as a representative of a significant habitat and natural community within the Commonwealth.
- 💧 To study the unique natural features and ecology of this area.
- 💧 To educate the public regarding these unique features, in a manner that limits public impacts to the site, and encourages an increased awareness and stewardship for the site.

Due to the changes to the hunting policy recommended above, hunting will be allowed in the Nature Preserve under the guidelines established by MassWildlife hunting regulations and with a MDC Special Permit.

MDC/DWM will continue to monitor use of the area by snowmobiles and work with State and Environmental Police to enforce the watershed regulations.

4. Off-Watershed Lands

2003 Public Access Policy: Eliminate this designation and integrate entire zone into the Intake Protection Zone (see **New Policies, section 1**).

F. Public Access and Security

Since the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, a greater focus has been placed upon security of our precious water resources. While good watershed protection would dictate limiting public access in close proximity to the Intake Protection Zone, recent events have heightened awareness for such protection. The MDC's no access policy at the Intake Protection Zone is needed as an effective measure of watershed protection and appropriate security measure.

Beyond the established MDC Intake Protection Zone at the Wachusett Reservoir, there may be a call for limiting public access in other areas due to potential threats to the security of the water supply. This may involve temporary suspension of all public access to lands within close proximity to the Reservoir or expansion of areas with no public access. If and when this were to occur, MDC would clearly identify such areas in the field and use available media outlets to keep the public informed of any public access changes that may become necessary.

Table 5
MDC/DWM Public Access Policy Summary
Wachusett Reservoir Watershed

	Intake Protection Zone					Reservoir & Tributary Shorelines; West Waushacum Pond Zone	Tributary Headwaters Zone
ACTIVITY	A1	A2	B1 *	B2 *	C		
VEHICLE ACCESS							
Off Road Driving (ORVs, ATVs)	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Snowmobiling	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Bicycling	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓	⊘	✓
FOOT ACCESS							
Walking/Hiking	⊘	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dog Walking	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓	⊘	⊘	⊘ ¹
Cross-Country Skiing	⊘	✓	⊘	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shoreline Fishing	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓	✓
Fishing with Waders	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓ ²	✓
Horseback Riding	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Hunting	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓ ³
WATER ACCESS							
Boating – non-motorized	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓ ⁴	✓
Boating – motorized (including “jet skis”)	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Swimming	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Ice Skating/Ice Fishing	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
OTHER ACTIVITIES							
Camping	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Picnicking	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓	✓
Fires & Cooking	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Programs/Assemblies	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	✓ ³	⊘
Trail Clearing/Trail Marking/Advertising	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘
Collecting/Metal Detecting	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘	⊘

✓ – Public access is allowed in designated areas only

⊘ – Activity prohibited

* All access to this area is currently prohibited for security reasons. MDC will re-open this area for the allowed uses when conditions permit.

¹ Dogs allowed with hunting permit ² Upstream of the MDC Dam at Oakdale Power Station on the Quinapoxet River and upstream of the Stillwater River confluence with Waushacum Brook. ³ MDC Special Permit required ⁴ Canoes/Kayaks allowed at: West Waushacum Pond; on the Stillwater River upstream of the steel bridge at Muddy Pond Rd.; on the Quinapoxet River upstream of River Rd. turn-off between Canada Mills and Oakdale Power Station.

Public access is allowed in designated areas only. Any activity that injures or defaces the property of the Commonwealth is strictly prohibited. All alcoholic beverages are prohibited. Night access is prohibited on MDC land in the Wachusett Reservoir watershed. See 350 CMR 11.09(2) for complete list of regulations. For additional information, contact the Wachusett/Sudbury Watershed Ranger Station at (978) 365-3800 or go to www.state.ma.us/mdc/pacc.htm. In an emergency, contact the Watershed Rangers or the Massachusetts State Police at (508) 829-8410.

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